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UNCLAS DJIBOUTI 000475

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: HEYDAY FOR GEOTHERMAL PROJECT IN DJIBOUTIAN PRESS

REF: DJIBOUTI 447

¶11. (U) Summary: Following the kick-off conference to the African Rift Valley Geothermal Development Facility (reftel), La Nation, the government run newspaper, ran several in-depth articles on the events of the conference and geothermal potential for Djibouti in its March 31, 2004 edition. Post feels this expansive coverage of the conference is an indication of the importance the Government of Djibouti is putting on this effort. End Summary.

¶12. (U) The Djiboutian government is making a grand show of its newly announced commitment to pursuing geothermal energy with four and a half pages of articles, nearly half the paper, in La Nation March 31 on the ARGeo conference that took place March 17-20. PolOff and Econ/Comm Assistant attended the full conference and noted that the official photographer was present for all events and many sessions had Radio Television Djibouti (RTD) there as well. La Nation's coverage included a summary of the conference and its outcomes, a history of the geothermal program in Djibouti, details of the ARGeo program, an interview on the potential of geothermal energy with Secretary General of the Ministry of Energy, Abdi Farah Chideh, and the full text of President Guelleh's message which was read at the opening of the conference. With such fanfare given to the project, one gets the impression the Government of Djibouti has taken a "no-turning-back" attitude towards the pursuit of geothermal energy.

¶13. (U) Among the most important points highlighted by these articles is the change in attitude of those responsible for energy and electricity in the government. Secretary General of the Ministry of Energy, Abdi Farah Chideh, was quoted as saying "the workshop marking the launch of the ARGeo project was a perfect success. I do not see why I would doubt the success of the project itself." Chideh in earlier meetings with PolOff had seemed very hesitant and doubtful of the proposals from an American company interested in developing the geothermal resources in Djibouti, saying that there was not enough research done. Chideh mentioned that the government hoped the ARGeo project would result in "a knowledge of the geothermal energy potential throughout Djibouti, ending in studying the possibilities of an eventual geothermal plant for the production of electricity, that is to say a less expensive energy for the benefit of the population."

¶14. (U) The message from President Guelleh was very forward leaning noting that "it should not escape our minds the need to adapt our economies to the new world environment marked by a technological and scientific revolution ... Geothermal energy constitutes for our countries and our populations an alternative to attain progress and a real national independence." Guelleh also commented that the theme of the conference was one that carried hope that would permit the country to put its strategies for sustainable development and the fight against poverty on a durable and solid base.

¶15. (U) Comment: We note that the Honorary Consul for Japan in Djibouti, Maitre Farah Mourad, queried Ambassador very heavily on the prospects for geothermal development in Djibouti. It is not clear if there is Japanese interest in a project. Japan provides around US\$ 10 million in aid per year to Djibouti, according to the Honorary Consul. End Comment.

RAGSDALE